



Congressman Jackson Remembers Dr. Ronald Walters

To read Congressman Jackson's remembrance of Dr. Ronald Walters, and thoughts from other Members of Congress, click [here](#) .

Last week, our country lost a moral and intellectual giant. Dr. Ronald W. Walters, a professor of politics and leadership at the University of Maryland, passed away on Friday at the age of 72. His quiet, humble nature belied the scope of his mind and the breadth of his interests.

I was with Dr. Walters and his wife, Pat, on Friday, praying with him and my father, Reverend Jesse Jackson. While it was a sad day, I am comforted by the fact that he will not suffer any more from the cancer that took his life.

Dr. Walters was that rare combination of activist and academic. He was as comfortable discussing the most complex aspects of policy and culture as he was in laying out the nuts-and-bolts tactics of a political campaign - he was equal parts street corner strategist and ivory tower theorist.

In that vein, the greatest testament to Dr. Walters' work is the extent to which his ideas and pursuits have manifested themselves in changed realities and beliefs in our country. He was a champion of comprehensive health care for all Americans and for a two-state solution in the Middle East before either proposal was accepted by the mainstream. When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, Dr. Walters was a clear voice for the poor and left-behind citizens of the region, calling on our government to live up to its promise by looking out for the least among us.

On the political side, he was one of the chief architects of my father's presidential campaigns in 1984 and 1988. While Reverend Jackson ultimately did not win the presidency, the campaigns literally changed the face of American electoral politics by inviting millions of new voters into the process and inspiring a generation of political leaders, strategists and activists.

In his role on my father's campaigns, Dr. Walters was the driving force behind the adoption of proportional allocation of delegates in the Democratic primary system. That shift made our nomination process fairer and more "small-d" democratic, and laid the groundwork for 2008's epic, historic contest between then-Senators Hillary Rodham Clinton and Barack Obama.

Indeed, President Obama's ascent from the Illinois State Senate, to our state's junior United States Senator to the first African-American Commander-in-Chief would not have been possible without the pioneering work of so many who came before him, with Dr. Walters at the head of that class.

Throughout his long career, Dr. Walters never forgot the practical, every day work that needed to be done on behalf of all Americans to make our country a better place. Early in his life, Dr. Walters participated in one of the very first lunch-counter sit-ins at the dawn of the Civil Rights Movement, in his hometown of Wichita, Kansas. Later, he was a key confidant of Rep. Charles Diggs of Michigan, the first chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus. Until his final days, Dr. Walters was in constant contact with CBC members and our staffs.

As the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's 40th Annual Legislative Conference gets underway on September 15th, I'm sure many participants will have Dr. Walters in their hearts. If the CBC is the conscience of the Congress, as many have said, then he was our moral, spiritual and intellectual backbone.

I will miss Dr. Walters' friendship and guidance, and our country will miss the profound role he played in our political and intellectual life. I only wish there were more giants like him to lean on.